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Timothy S. Prinz

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MOVING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN? ROSS PEROT AND ANTI-INCUMBENCY IN THE 1992 CONGRESSIONAL RACES

Timothy S. Prinz, University of Virginia

The 1992 election was certainly one of the most unusual in recent memory. George Bush's fall from grace, Bill Clinton's rebound from scandal time and time again, and the emergence of Ross Perot as perhaps the ultimate "outsider" candidate made for a fascinating and unpredictable election year. A similar uncertainty was attached to the 1992 elections to Congress. Put simply, 1992 was not a good year to be known as a political insider for members of Congress. A long series of scandals (the House bank, the House post office) and seeming policy failures reduced public support for Congress to an all-time low. The emergence of Perot's anti-Washington message combined with a burgeoning term limitations movement meant that more than a few incumbents were worried about returning to Capitol Hill.

Some have argued that the outsider dimension is the key to understanding the politics of 1992 (Ceaser and Busch 1993). At the presidential level, Bill Clinton best captured the traditional dimension of party and ideology, as well as the new outsider dimension in American politics. And in the congressional races, the outsider dimension produced an unprecedented turnover in the House and Senate, as many an incumbent retired rather than risk the prospect of electoral defeat, and several more were defeated in the primary and general elections.

To what extent did the outsider dimension influence the politics of congressional elections in 1992? Certainly the emergence of Ross Perot reinforced a growing anti-incumbent sentiment, raising the possibility that the elections were powerfully influenced by these forces. At the very least, it would appear that Perot gave substance and force to the voters' desire for change in Washington, for an end to

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"gridlock" and "politics as usual".

This paper examines the influence of Ross Perot in the 1992 congressional elections, focusing particularly on whether Perot's anti-Washington message translated into an anti-incumbent vote in the 1992 House and Senate races. Despite the expectation that Ross Perot might have influenced voters' decisions in these races, there is little evidence of a Perot effect in either the House or the Senate. By and large, these elections went more or less by the book: although national forces played a role in these races, Ross Perot did not, and local candidates and local campaigns mattered much more for explaining the vote. Section one presents the case for and against Perot's influence in the congressional races. Section two focuses on the results on the House side, relying on data from the 1992 National Elections Study and Voter Research Survey's exit poll, and Section three relies on the same data for an analysis of Senate races. Section four presents a concluding discussion of these results and the prospects for "political outsiders" in future congressional races.

Ross Perot and the Race for Congress

When it comes to explaining the politics of congressional elections, scholars of Congress are fond of quoting Tip O'Neill's well-known aphorism that "all politics is local." Generally speaking, the literature on congressional elections has described these races (especially for the House) as largely local affairs over local candidates and local issues. Only occasionally do national forces or national issues intercede to influence outcomes in these races (Jacobson 1993).

Yet, from the very outset the 1992 House and Senate elections looked anything but conventional. Many House members were feeling the effects of the check-bouncing scandal at the House bank, redistricting had created an aura of uncertainty for many an incumbent seeking to return to Capitol Hill, and public support for the Congress and its legislative product had reached an all-time low. In addition, a growing term limits movement combined with the roller coaster-like character of the presidential election and the emergence of Ross Perot to further dampen the prospects of incumbent members of Congress. All indications were that the time was ripe for sweeping change in both the House and the Senate.

Despite this growing disaffection with the Congress, voters sent mixed messages to their representatives in Washington. Once again, over 90 percent of incumbents seeking reelection to the House won their races, and 85 percent of Senate incumbents won as well. On the face of it, these results are quite striking. Despite widespread dissatisfaction with politics as usual, the vast majority of voters still chose to return their incumbent representatives to Washington. One

observer's description of the 1990 elections might well be applied to 1992:

Most Americans blamed Congress for a large part of the trouble with America; most Americans also made an exception in the case of their own representatives.... How long can this pressure and these contradictions build without exploding? Which election will bring on the voter eruption? (Bennett 1992: 9)

It would be an understatement to say that many thought 1992 would produce the voter reaction Bennett describes. The combination of scandal, anti-Washington sentiment, and Ross Perot's unique populist message appeared to be more than sufficient to wreak havoc on Congress.

Yet, change did occur in the institution. Thanks to a substantial number of retirements by incumbents, 110 new members were elected to the House, producing the largest freshman class since 1948, and in all 14 new Senators also took their places on Capitol Hill. In addition, the representation of women and other minority groups in Congress rose substantially as a result of the 1992 elections. Change did come to the institution, but not directly via the ballot box, nor did the turnover do much to alter the partisan balance in Congress.

Interpreting these results is no easy task. On the one hand, the glass appears to be half full, since substantial change did occur in Congress as a result of the election; on the other hand, the glass is also half empty, as voters retained their habit of supporting incumbents seeking reelection. While one might argue that Ross Perot, term limitations, and a growing outsider dimension were responsible for the substantial turnover in Congress, it is hard to build more than circumstantial case for this conclusion.

On the face of it, there is good reason to believe that Ross Perot's presence in the presidential race had a large impact on the 1992 House races. Perot developed a substantial following in all 50 states around the theme of returning government to its rightful owners--the people. Taken to its logical extreme, such a call for reform could have resulted in sweeping change in the House and Senate, as voters opted to "throw the rascals out" and elect a new slate of representatives to serve in Washington. Thus, the expectation here is straightforward: Perot's brand of populism and no-nonsense approach to government struck a chord with voters in 1992, one that might be expected to resonate not only in the voters' choice of presidential candidates, but also in their selection of representatives to the House and Senate. From the standpoint of pure numbers, Perot won almost one out of every five votes cast in the

presidential race. If prospective challengers were able to harness Perot's message and themes to the service of anti-incumbency, the Perot factor alone would have been sufficient to make any incumbent with a comfortable 20-point cushion exceedingly nervous.

On the other hand, a case can also be made for the absence of Perot's influence on House races. Challengers may not have been well positioned to exploit the Perot phenomenon. Perot rose to prominence relatively late in the electoral cycle, in many cases after the filing deadline for House and Senate candidates had passed. Even further, it may have been difficult for even strong challengers to exploit Perot's message and momentum on behalf of their candidacies. In general, challengers would have to walk a fine line between seeking to woo Perot voters and alienating their base of support. Finally, the in and out and in again nature of Perot's presidential bid may have served to mute the impact he might have exerted on congressional races. Certainly congressional candidates would have found it difficult to read the winds of political change and predict how best to respond in their own races.

Thus, the stage is set for this examination of Ross Perot's influence on the 1992 House and Senate races. On the one hand, it is worth asking whether Perot's presence incited an anti-incumbent movement in these races. On the other hand, there are good reasons to doubt the influence of Perot. House races in particular are notorious for being local races largely immune to the influence of national forces, and redistricting, the economy, scandal, and other factors also probably played a role in shaping the 1992 results. In such a setting, it may be difficult to observe a Perot effect. Nonetheless, there is always the possibility that 1992 might have been different, and that at long last the voter rebellion expected by many observers finally appeared.

Ross Perot and Anti-Incumbency in the 1992 House Races

The literature on congressional elections describes House races as largely a function of partisan forces and familiarity with and evaluations of the two candidates in the race. Thus,

$$\text{Equation 1: } VOTECHOICE = a + b_1PARTYID + b_2KNOWLEDGE + b_3EVALUATIONS + e$$

represents a fairly standard model of the vote choice in House races (Jacobson 1992). The simplest test for a Perot effect is to incorporate a variety of measures from the 1992 National Election Study of congressional voters that are designed to account for this effect in Equation 1.

TABLE 1. PEROT VOTERS AND ANTI-INCUMBENCY
DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE FOR INCUMBENT
 (Probit estimates)

| INDEPEN- DENT VARIABLE | STANDARD MODEL | PEROT VOTERS | DEMO. INCUMB. | REPUB. INCUMB. |
|--|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Constant | 0.05 (0.33) | 0.06 (0.33) | 0.24 (0.39) | -0.41 (0.66) |
| Party Identification | 1.20* (0.13) | 1.19* (0.13) | 1.21* (0.16) | 1.29* (0.24) |
| Familiar with Incumbent | 0.13 (0.34) | 0.12 (0.34) | 0.04 (0.39) | 0.42 (0.69) |
| Familiar with Challenger | -0.28* (0.14) | -0.29* (0.14) | -0.41* (0.18) | -0.13 (0.26) |
| Likes Something About Incumbent | 1.17* (0.14) | 1.16* (0.14) | 1.10* (0.16) | 1.35* (0.24) |
| Dislikes Something About Incumbent | -0.78* (0.15) | -0.77* (0.15) | -0.84* (0.18) | -0.58+ (0.30) |
| Likes Something About Challenger | -1.54* (0.19) | -1.53* (0.19) | -1.63* (0.24) | -1.43* (0.36) |
| Dislikes Something About Challenger | 0.65* (0.21) | 0.64* (0.21) | 0.97* (0.26) | -0.23 (0.39) |
| Voted for Perot | --- | -0.008 (0.16) | 0.19 (0.21) | -0.26 (0.26) |
| N | 811 | 803 | 562 | 241 |
| Log Likelihood | -267.5 | -266.4 | -178.1 | -83.3 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 86.6 | 86.4 | 87.9 | 85.5 |

+ $p < 0.10$

* $p < 0.05$

Source: American National Election Study 1992 (ICPSR 6067)

Table 1 presents a direct test of the hypothesis that Perot voters were more likely to vote against the incumbent in the 1992 House elections. Column 1 contains the results for the standard model to provide a baseline for comparison. It is worth noting that the standard model performs exceedingly well. All of the variables work as expected, with the exception of familiarity with the incumbent, which can most likely be explained by the circumstances of 1992. Thanks to scandal and the like, incumbents were exceedingly well known in 1992, to the point that awareness of the incumbent contributed very little to the likelihood of voting for the incumbent. Column 2 presents the results for the model for Perot voters, and as is readily apparent, Perot voters were no more likely to vote against incumbents in 1992. As expected, the sign on the coefficient is negative, but not statistically significant. Columns 3 and 4 present the results of the model for Democratic incumbents and Republican incumbents respectively, in the event that the anti-incumbent tide might have been focused disproportionately on one of the two major parties. Again, the Perot variable fails to make a statistically significant contribution to the model in either equation.

The initial evidence indicates that Perot voters failed to show their anti-incumbent stripes in the 1992 House races. Table 2 presents several variations on the theme, in an effort to isolate a possible Perot effect in particular races or among particular subsets of the voting population. Column 1 examines independent voters only, on the theory that independents might be more likely to act on Perot's anti-Washington message and vote against the incumbent. Again, however, the data provide little evidence that independent voters responded in this fashion. Column 2 focuses on races that had a strong challenger,¹ to see whether competitive challengers were able to exploit Perot's anti-incumbency theme. Here, too, the results fail to indicate any significant Perot effect. Apparently, challengers were unable to exploit Perot's message on behalf of their candidacies. Column 3 narrows the focus to races in states where Perot ran well at the presidential level,² but even in these states Perot voters were no more likely to vote against incumbents. The last column focuses on Perot supporters--those who rated Perot warmly on the feeling thermometer scale (60 or more)--but even strong supporters of Perot were no more likely to vote against incumbents.

The absence of an anti-incumbent effect in 1992 is not just limited to Ross Perot. Table 3 examines the connection between support for

¹Races with strong challengers were identified based on information presented in *Congressional Quarterly's* election outlook.

²Defined as states where Perot received 21% or more of the presidential vote.

term limitations and anti-incumbency in 1992. As is apparent from the results, voters who said they supported some form of term limitation (an overwhelming 80% of those surveyed) were also no more likely to "throw the rascal out" and vote to unseat their incumbent representative. Thus, whatever anti-incumbent mood might have existed in 1992, neither Ross Perot nor the term limitations movement succeeded in focusing this mood in the congressional races.

TABLE 2. A CLOSER LOOK AT PEROT VOTERS IN HOUSE RACES

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE FOR INCUMBENT
(Probit estimates)

| Independent Variables | Independent Voters | Strong Challengers | States Where Perot Did Well | Perot Fans |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Constant | 0.78 (0.51) | -0.06 (0.54) | 0.24 (0.39) | 0.10 (0.60) |
| Party ID | 0.47* (0.19) | 1.36* (0.23) | 1.21* (0.16) | 1.08* (0.18) |
| Familiar with Incumbent | 0.22 (0.50) | -0.39 (0.54) | 0.04 (0.39) | 0.56 (0.57) |
| Familiar with Challenger | -0.25 (0.21) | 0.15 (0.38) | -0.41* (0.18) | -0.27 (0.20) |
| Likes Something About Incumbent | - - - | 1.16* (0.14) | 1.10* (0.16) | 1.21* (0.20) |
| Dislikes Something About Incumbent | -0.65* (0.21) | -0.77* (0.15) | -0.84* (0.18) | -0.83* (0.22) |
| Likes Something About Challenger | -1.55* (0.26) | -1.53* (0.19) | -1.63* (0.24) | -1.29* (0.28) |

Table 2 (continued)

| | | | | |
|--|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Dislikes Something About Challenger | 0.72* (0.28) | 0.64* (0.21) | 0.97* (0.26) | 0.56+ (0.30) |
| Voted for Perot | -0.18 (0.21) | -0.008 (0.16) | 0.19 (0.21) | 0.06 (0.18) |
| N | 282 | 803 | 562 | 380 |
| Log Likelihood | -123.3 | -266.4 | -178.1 | -133.2 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 81.6 | 86.4 | 87.9 | 85 |

+ $p < 0.10$

* $p < 0.05$

Source: American National Election Studies 1992 (ICPSR 6067)

TABLE 3. TERM LIMITATIONS AND ANTI-INCUMBENCY

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE FOR INCUMBENT
(Probit estimates)

| Independent Variables | All Incumbent Races | Independent | Perot Fans | States Where Perot Did Well |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Constant | 0.51 (0.41) | 0.87 (0.62) | 0.38 (0.70) | 0.35 (0.61) |
| Party ID | 1.19* (0.13) | 0.44* (0.17) | 1.08* (0.18) | 1.06* (0.21) |
| Familiar with Incumbent | 0.04 (0.36) | 0.001 (0.50) | 0.29 (0.66) | 0.09 (0.58) |
| Familiar with Challenger | -0.28* (0.14) | -0.28 (0.23) | -0.25 (0.66) | -0.21 (0.23) |

Table 3 (continued)

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Likes Something About Incumbent | 1.16* (0.14) | 1.31* (0.24) | 1.18* (0.20) | 1.06* (0.22) |
| Dislikes Something About Incumbent | -0.73* (0.15) | -0.59* (0.24) | -0.82* (0.22) | -0.76* (0.22) |
| Likes Something About Challenger | -1.53* (0.19) | -1.79* (0.31) | -1.25* (0.28) | -1.33* (0.30) |
| Dislikes Something About Challenger | 0.62* (0.21) | 0.51 (0.32) | 0.56+ (0.29) | 0.61 (0.38) |
| Support Term Limitation | -0.16 (0.17) | -0.07 (0.30) | -0.07 (0.23) | -0.03 (0.27) |
| N | 765 | 275 | 364 | 321 |
| Log Likelihood | -251.2 | -101.5 | -128.9 | -99.2 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 87.5 | 84.7 | 85.4 | 87.5 |

+ $p < 0.10$ * $p < 0.05$

Source: American National Election Studies 1992 (ICPSR 6067)

These results largely confirm Jacobson's conclusions concerning Perot's influence on the aggregate congressional vote (1993a: 178). Perot's supporters might have been expected to vote against incumbents in large numbers, but there is simply no evidence that they chose to do so. Whatever part of the Perot message resonated with voters, it seems apparent that the anti-incumbency theme did not play a part in House races.³

A case might be made that the standard model described in Equation 1 stacks the deck too much against finding a Perot effect in House

³ Similar results appeared in a preliminary analysis of Senate races.

ances. After all, it may be the case that Perot's influence was indirect; that Perot's message might have operated on the vote choice through the candidate likes and dislikes measures, particularly incumbent dislikes and challenger likes. Two responses are in order. First, while we might expect a strong connection between the likes/dislikes responses and support for Perot, in fact there is very little connection apparent in the data. Most of the responses to both the challenger likes and incumbent dislikes questions refer to the personal characteristics of the candidates, and lack any clear-cut connection to the themes or candidacy of Ross Perot. Moreover, a simple model of these responses illustrates the absence of any connection between support for Ross Perot and evaluations of the congressional candidates:

Equation 2:

$$\text{INCUMBENT} = -1.49 - 0.52\text{party} + 0.13\text{educ} + 0.24\text{interest} - 0.04\text{perot}$$

$$\text{DISLIKE} \quad (0.15) \quad (0.09) \quad (0.03) \quad (0.05) \quad (0.11)$$

Equation 3:

$$\text{CHALLENGER} = -2.09 + 0.68\text{party} + 0.14\text{educ} + 0.36\text{interest} - 0.19\text{perot}$$

$$\text{LIKE} \quad (0.20) \quad (0.09) \quad (0.03) \quad (0.06) \quad (0.14)$$

(Note: results from probit estimation. Standard errors in parentheses.)

By and large, candidate evaluations were a function of several prominent political characteristics of the respondents, including their party identification, level of education, and interest in the House race. Perot supporters are no more likely to offer an unfavorable evaluation of an incumbent or a favorable one of the challenger after controlling for these factors.

One impressive finding that emerges from Tables 1 and 2, is the striking consistency of the parameter estimates across the various models. Despite the unusual character of the election (Jacobson 1993a), the conventional wisdom held pretty much true to form as far as individual vote decisions are concerned. In contested races with an incumbent, the vote was largely a function of party identification and the relative evaluations of the two candidates in the race. And on this basis, incumbents were by and large very successful in retaining their seats. In this sense at least, the 1992 House races were far from unusual, conforming to a pattern that has existed for almost two decades.

Interestingly, the VRS national exit poll data produce a slightly different conclusion concerning the influence of Perot on incumbent House races. These differences may in fact be due to weaknesses in the

VRS data set; the exit poll focused primarily on the presidential contest, and the crucial evidence concerning voter information and evaluations so central to the results in Tables 1 and 2 is absent. Thus, the data permit only an incomplete test for the Perot's influence on the incumbent vote in 1992.

Simple bivariate comparisons provide the first indication of a possible Perot effect nationwide. Individuals who voted for Ross Perot in the presidential race were somewhat more likely to vote against the incumbent in their local House race (Figure 1), though the differences

FIGURE 1. CROSSTABULATION OF PEROT VOTE BY HOUSE VOTE

| PRESIDENTIAL VOTE | HOUSE Challenger | VOTE Incumbent |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | | |
| Other | 77.3% | 83.0% |
| Perot | 22.7% | 17.0% |
| N | 8282 | 6066 |
| Chi square: | 66.23 | |

are fairly slight (but statistically significant, as indicated by the chi-square statistic). Apparently, however, the threshold here is the willingness to vote for Perot. Voters who claimed to support Perot in the survey but did not vote for him because they did not expect him to win showed no greater propensity to cast an anti-incumbent ballot in the House election (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. CROSSTABULATION OF SUPPORT FOR PEROT BY HOUSE VOTE

| SUPPORT FOR PEROT | HOUSE Challenger | VOTE Incumbent |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|
| | | |
| Would not support him | 59.0% | 60.4% |
| Would have voted for Perot if he could win | 41.0% | 39.6% |
| N | 4704 | 3632 |
| Chi square: | 1.67 | |

Since limitations in the VRS data prevent a complete test for the influence of Perot after controlling for the effects of other variables, the results in Table 4 present a limited test. The model employs several controls for individual voter characteristics, including party identification, level of education, a dummy measure for younger voters,

for the unemployed, and for first-time voters (on the theory that these groups might be somewhat more likely to vote against the incumbent in 1992). Also included in the model are two national issues variables and a Perot voter dummy variable. As the results in Column 1 indicate, Perot voters were substantially more likely to vote against the incumbent in the 1992 House races. However, the disaggregated results in Columns 2 and 3 are even more interesting. As in the NES data, Democratic incumbents gained votes from the poor state of the

TABLE 4. THE PEROT FACTOR IN HOUSE RACES: THE VRS EXIT POLL RESULTS

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE FOR INCUMBENT

(Probit estimates)

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLES | All Voters | Democrats | Republicans |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Constant | -0.52* (0.06) | -0.43* (0.08) | -0.37* (0.09) |
| Party Identification | 1.51* (0.04) | 1.20* (0.05) | 1.33* (0.06) |
| Level of Education | 0.005 (0.01) | -0.007 (0.02) | 0.03 (0.02) |
| First-Time Voter | -0.03 (0.06) | -0.07 (0.08) | 0.02 (0.10) |
| Young Voter | -0.02 (0.05) | 0.06 (0.06) | -0.14* (0.07) |
| Unemployed | -0.06 (0.08) | 0.09 (0.10) | -0.02 (0.12) |
| National Economy | -0.02 (0.03) | -0.23* (0.03) | 0.23* (0.03) |
| Personal Financial Situation | -0.03 (0.03) | -0.20* (0.03) | 0.14* (0.04) |
| Voted for Perot | -0.21* (0.04) | -0.34* (0.06) | -0.08 (0.06) |
| N | 6307 | 3214 | 2769 |
| Log Likelihood | -3407.2 | -1681.8 | -1447.6 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 75.7 | 74.7 | 76.4 |

+ $p < 0.10$

* $p < 0.05$

Source: Voter Research Survey Exit Poll 1992 (ICPSR 6102)

economy, while Republicans lost votes. Moreover, Perot's supporters were markedly more likely to vote against Democratic incumbents than Republican incumbents, providing some initial indications of a fairly sweeping protest vote in 1992.

The results of the analysis of the VRS exit poll data reveal a clear anti-incumbent tendency among Perot voters in House races, though the effect is relatively small. There are a number of possible explanations for these apparent differences. As noted above, the most significant of these is the differences in the contents of the two data sets, most notably the absence of any variables specifically focused on the House race in the VRS exit poll. Another likely source for the variance in these results is the differing samples of the two surveys. Both are designed to be random national samples, but the VRS survey casts its net much wider and contains nearly seven times the number of respondents. Further, neither are designed to be accurate district-level samples for the local House race, which could affect the results for either analysis. Finally, the different models and controls employed, particularly the absence of candidate effects in the VRS data, may mean that the Perot variable is picking up some of these effects. In the end, the more thorough NES survey at the congressional level, combined with the substantial weight of prior analyses of these data in other election years, renders the conclusions derived from the results in Tables 1 and 2 more credible.

Before turning to the Senate, Table 5 examines the results for open seat races in the NES survey. Here, Ross Perot does appear to have exerted an influence on these contests, if only in the sense that his focus on the economy made a difference in open seat races. Interestingly, Perot voters appear much more likely (other things being equal) to support Democratic candidates for open seats (Column 1). But further inspection reveals that the Perot variable may be serving as a proxy for economic discontent in 1992. Equations 2 and 3 include several measures of the economy, and once they are incorporated into the equations, the Perot variable fails to exert significant influence. Interestingly, a strong anti-Republican bias appears in these results. Republican open seat candidates suffered greatly at the hands of voters who thought the national economy had gotten worse, that the country was no longer on the right track, or disapproved of George Bush's handling of the economy. Thus, if Perot's candidacy did indeed have an impact on the 1992 House races, it was probably to focus voter attention on the economy as the standard for judging all candidates for office.

Despite the absence of a strong Perot effect, the results in Table 5 raise the possibility that other national forces, most notably the economy, exerted a strong influence on the vote. In addition, the strongly partisan effects apparent in Table 5 are a striking finding as

TABLE 5. THE PEROT FACTOR AND OPEN SEAT RACES

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE IN OPEN SEAT RACE
(Probit estimates)

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLES | Equation 1 | Equation 2 | Equation 3 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Constant | 0.72 (0.34) | 0.76 (0.49) | 0.32 (0.35) |
| Interest in Politics | -0.43 (0.28) | -0.67* (0.32) | -0.47* (0.21) |
| Party Identification | 0.74* (0.17) | 0.68 (0.18) | 0.61* (0.23) |
| Likes Something About Democrat | 1.87* (0.46) | 2.20* (0.49) | 2.52* (0.62) |
| Dislikes Something About Democrat | -2.00* (0.56) | -2.29* (0.58) | -3.04* (0.77) |
| Likes Something About Republican | -2.21* (0.44) | -2.36* (0.47) | -2.63* (0.59) |
| Dislikes Something About Republican | 1.01* (0.50) | 1.21* (0.52) | 1.55* (0.74) |
| Voted for Perot | 1.06* (0.51) | 1.13* (0.57) | 0.91 (0.66) |
| National Economy | --- | -1.08* (0.35) | -1.23* (0.43) |
| Country on Right Track | --- | --- | 1.41* (0.61) |
| Approve Bush's Handling of Economy | --- | --- | -1.16* (0.56) |
| N | 158 | 155 | 144 |
| Log Likelihood | -45.3 | -266.4 | -30.8 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 88.6 | 86.4 | 90.3 |

+ $p < 0.10$

* $p < 0.05$

Source: American National Election Studies 1992 (ICPSR 6067)

well. Voters responded to national economic effects by evaluating open seat candidates in a highly partisan fashion, rewarding Democratic candidates and punishing Republican candidates for the dismal state of

TABLE 6. NATIONAL FORCES AND ANTI-INCUMBENCY IN HOUSE RACES, 1992

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE FOR INCUMBENT

(Probit estimates)

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLES | All Incumbents | Democrats Only | Republicans Only |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Constant | 0.46 (0.39) | 1.08* (0.47) | -0.58 (0.84) |
| Party Identification | 1.14* (0.13) | 0.93* (0.18) | 0.99* (0.26) |
| Familiar with Incumbent | 0.17 (0.35) | 0.09 (0.41) | 0.82 (0.77) |
| Familiar with Challenger | -0.30* (0.15) | -0.51* (0.19) | -0.22 (0.27) |
| Likes Something About Incumbent | 1.24* (0.14) | 1.28* (0.18) | 1.27* (0.27) |
| Dislikes Something About Incumbent | -0.75* (0.15) | -0.86* (0.18) | -0.58+ (0.32) |
| Likes Something About Challenger | -1.51* (0.20) | -1.66* (0.25) | -1.45* (0.39) |
| Dislikes Something About Challenger | 0.58* (0.21) | 0.86* (0.27) | -0.16 (0.41) |
| Personal Financial Status | 0.04 (0.08) | 0.06 (0.11) | 0.05 (0.14) |
| Country on Right Track | 0.33+ (0.17) | 0.48* (0.21) | -0.07 (0.34) |
| National Economy Worse | -0.01 (0.12) | 0.12 (0.15) | 0.42+ (0.25) |
| Disapprove Bush's Handling of the Economy | 0.22 (0.17) | 0.54* (0.21) | -0.58 (0.39) |
| N | 780 | 551 | 229 |
| Log Likelihood | -253 | -160.6 | -78.3 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 86.7 | 87.6 | 84.3 |

+ $p < 0.10$

* $p < 0.05$

Source: American National Election Studies 1992 (ICPSR 6067)

TABLE 7. CHECK BOUNCING, NATIONAL ISSUES, AND ANTI-INCUMBENCY IN THE 1992 HOUSE RACES

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE FOR INCUMBENT

(Probit estimates)

| Independent Variables | Equation 1 | Equation 2 | Equation 3 | Equation 4 |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Constant | 0.32 (0.63) | 0.23 (0.63) | 0.47 (0.65) | 0.36 (0.65) |
| Party Identification | 1.38* (0.19) | 1.36* (0.19) | 1.38* (0.19) | 1.34* (0.19) |
| Familiar with Incumbent | 0.40 (0.57) | 0.39 (0.57) | 0.53 (0.59) | 0.51 (0.59) |
| Familiar with Challenger | -0.46* (0.20) | -0.50* (0.20) | -0.51* (0.21) | -0.58* (0.21) |
| Likes Something About Incumbent | 1.33* (0.18) | 1.35* (0.19) | 1.41* (0.19) | 1.42* (0.20) |
| Dislikes Something About Incumbent | -0.84* (0.19) | -0.84* (0.19) | -0.83* (0.20) | -0.83* (0.20) |
| Likes Something About Challenger | -1.58* (0.25) | -1.59* (0.25) | -1.58* (0.26) | -1.57* (0.29) |
| Dislikes Something About Challenger | 0.81* (0.28) | 0.80* (0.28) | 0.70* (0.28) | 0.72* (0.29) |
| Incumbent Bounced Checks | -0.33+ (0.17) | -0.32+ (0.17) | -0.32+ (0.17) | -0.07 (0.19) |
| National Economy | --- | -0.24+ (0.14) | --- | --- |

Table 7 (continued)

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|------------------|------------------|
| Country on Right Track | --- | --- | -0.71* (0.21) | --- |
| Bounced Checks x Right Track | --- | --- | --- | -1.10* (0.31) |
| N | 516 | 515 | 503 | 503 |
| Log Likelihood | -143.7 | -142.2 | -136.8 | -134.8 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 89.9 | 89.7 | 89.9 | 90.1 |

+ $p < 0.10$

* $p < 0.05$

Source: American National Election Studies 1992 (ICPSR 6067)

the economy. This conclusion is reinforced in several analyses of the effects of national forces in incumbent races. In contrast to many of the findings of previous analyses, voters' evaluations of the economy and the scandal at the House bank exerted a strong, direct influence on individual vote decisions (Prinz 1993). Tables 6 and 7 clearly demonstrate the pervasive role that national forces played in the vote for House incumbents in 1992.

Thus, to the extent that Ross Perot managed to focus voter attention on the economy and made it a crucial issue in the election, the data indicate Perot had a substantial impact on the 1992 House races. Unfortunately, no direct claims can be made from the data concerning Perot's impact via the economy, but these results are highly suggestive. Most importantly, economic considerations mattered in incumbent races in 1992. Assessments of the national economy influenced the vote substantially, with Democratic incumbents benefitting from voter unhappiness and Republican incumbents paying the price. It is more than a little ironic that the majority of House Democrats appeared to benefit from the voters' desire for change, but that appears to be precisely what happened in 1992.

Ross Perot and Anti-Incumbency in the 1992 Senate Elections

Senate elections bear a number of notable differences from House races, not least of which is the fact that until recently Senate elections

were much less studied than House contests. Senate races also tend to be much more competitive than the typical House contest, since most Senate seats attract quality challengers who are able to raise the necessary campaign funds to wage a full-scale campaign. The available evidence also suggests that Senate contests are more subject to national forces than House contests, perhaps as a result of this greater competition. In a recent analysis of aggregate election returns, Abramowitz (1988) notes that the local candidates and their campaigns, particularly campaign spending, exerted a substantial influence on outcomes, but that national political conditions also shaped the vote. Similarly, Richard Born presents some reasons for expecting that evaluations of the economy and presidential performance matter for Senate incumbents seeking reelection (1991). Finally, Wright and Berkman (1986) find substantial evidence for the influence of candidate policy positions on vote choice, and for the interaction between issues and evaluations of the economy and the president.

Unfortunately, most of the research on Senate elections focuses primarily on aggregate vote returns; with some limited exceptions (Westlye 1983; Wright 1989), a model of individual voting behavior in Senate elections is yet to be developed and tested. Thus, a first step is to develop a preliminary model of the individual vote choice similar to that presented in Equation 1. Previous efforts and the aggregate results provide some obvious clues: certainly party and ideology matter in Senate contests, as do the spending activities of the two candidates and voters' evaluations of the candidates. Similarly, national forces need to be included in the model, to both control and test for their influence.

Tables 8 and 9 present two attempts to develop and test a model of the individual vote in Senate elections, using both the NES and VRS data sets. In Table 8, the vote is modeled as a function of two characteristics of the voter (interest in the campaign and party identification), voters' evaluations of the candidates, and national forces (economic evaluations and the Perot variable). Put simply, there is little evidence of a Perot anti-incumbent effect in the data. In each model, the Perot variable fails to achieve standard levels of statistical significance, and is positive, indicating that voters who supported Perot are more likely to vote *for* the incumbent. Evaluations of the candidates and national forces play a strong role, as expected.

Analysis of the VRS exit poll data appear in Table 9. Again, there are relatively few control variables to incorporate into the data, because this test must be viewed as preliminary. As on the House side, the vote is modeled as a function of voter characteristics (party, ideology, first time voter, young voter), candidate activities (spending), and national issues. Party identification and the spending variables⁴ are highly

⁴Both absolute levels of spending and the logged values of these

TABLE 8. PEROT VOTERS IN THE 1992 SENATE RACES: A PRELIMINARY MODEL

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE FOR INCUMBENT
(Probit estimates)

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLES | ALL INCUMBENTS |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Constant | -0.43 (0.38) |
| Interest in the Campaign | -0.21 (0.14) |
| Party Identification | 1.00* (0.16) |
| Evaluations of Incumbent | 0.04* (0.004) |
| Evaluations of Challenger | -0.03* (0.004) |
| National Economy | 0.33* (0.14) |
| Voted for Perot | 0.18 (0.20) |
| N | 540 |
| Log Likelihood | -170.9 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 87.8 |

+ $p < 0.10$

* $p < 0.05$

Source: American National Election Studies 1992 (ICPSR 6067)

variables were tested, and both sets of variables displayed similar relationships. The results presented in Table 8 are for total candidate spending.

TABLE 9. PEROT VOTERS IN SENATE RACES: THE VRS EXIT POLL DATA

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: VOTE FOR INCUMBENT

(Probit estimates)

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLES | All Incumbents | Democrats Only | Republicans Only |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Constant | -0.67* (0.12) | -0.34 (0.24) | 0.17 (0.29) |
| Party Identification | 1.06* (0.07) | 0.89* (0.10) | 0.97* (0.12) |
| Ideology | 0.90* (0.07) | 0.82 (0.11) | 0.67* (0.11) |
| First-Time Voter | -0.03 (0.02) | 0.005 (0.16) | 0.12 (0.19) |
| Young Voter | -0.02 (0.09) | -0.09 (0.13) | -0.01 (0.14) |
| Incumbent Spending | 0.00003 (0.00003) | 0.00002 (0.00008) | -0.0002+ (0.0001) |
| Challenger Spending | -0.0001* (0.0004) | -0.0002* (0.00008) | 0.00008* (0.0001) |
| National Economy | -0.05* (0.03) | -0.25* (0.04) | 0.22* (0.06) |
| Personal Financial Status | 0.04 (0.04) | -0.18* (0.07) | 0.33* (0.08) |
| State Unemployment | 0.05 (0.03) | -0.04 (0.05) | 0.13 (0.09) |
| Voted for Perot | -0.07 (0.08) | -0.33* (0.12) | 0.18 (0.13) |
| N | 1701 | 944 | 757 |
| Log Likelihood | -884 | -465.1 | -365.2 |
| % Correctly Predicted | 75.2 | 76.7 | 77.8 |

+ p < 0.10

* p < 0.05

Source: Voter Research Surveys Exit Poll 1992 (ICPSR 6102)

significant in the model, and national issues, especially the economy, also emerge as an important determinant of the vote. Overall, the Perot variable fails to achieve standard levels of statistical significance,⁵ but the data for Democratic and Republican incumbents again reveal some interesting trends. As on the House side, Democratic incumbent Senators benefitted from voters' poor evaluation of the economy, while Republican incumbents tended to lose support. Also, Perot voters were much more likely to vote against Democratic incumbents in the Senate race, and to support Republican incumbents.

Conclusion

The data and analysis presented in this paper have perhaps raised more questions than they answer. With some notable exceptions, the evidence convincingly demonstrates the absence of a Perot influence in the 1992 congressional elections. Yet, it is the exceptions that are perhaps most interesting: why is there a strong Perot influence on the House side in the VRS exit poll data? Are the models' different specifications sufficient to explain this outcome? Is it indeed the case that the Perot variable is capturing the effects of local candidates and campaigns, and if these were incorporated into the model, the Perot effect would disappear, as it does in the NES data? Similarly, why are Perot voters so selective in their anti-incumbent wrath, choosing to exercise it more on Democratic incumbents? This finding may provide some useful preliminary evidence that Perot's supporters were exercising a kind of global rationality in 1992, seeking to replace all of those in power with other candidates.

Before rushing to the conclusion that Perot exerted little influence on the 1992 congressional elections, it is important to place these results in a particular context and to provide some interpretation. There is no denying that Ross Perot's entry into the presidential campaign fundamentally altered the political landscape, changing the dynamics of many campaigns. The fact that the economy was so central to outcomes in 1992 (in contrast to previous studies of House and Senate elections) perhaps best exemplifies the kind of influence that might be attributed to Perot and the presidential race in general. Put simply, when voters are fed up with politics as usual, they usually respond at the polls, and Perot probably helped by giving force and focus to their discontent.

There were also a number of important limits to Perot's influence on congressional races. For one, the uncertain character of Perot's candidacy probably served to dampen any impact he might have had on

⁵Bivariate comparisons of the Perot vote variable and the Senate vote revealed a similar null relationship.

voters in congressional elections. The timing of Perot's entry into the presidential race is also an issue: he came to prominence too late for many prospective candidates to enter the race and exploit his populist message. In addition, many challengers would have had considerable difficulty walking a fine line between maintaining their base of partisan support and attracting potential Perot voters. Finally, Perot may yet exert considerable influence over future House races. Perot's recent emphasis on the local impact of the NAFTA treaty is perhaps the most prominent case in point. In addition, there is evidence that United We Stand America is seeking to organize at the grass-roots level in congressional districts, and the "Perotistas" have publicly professed a greater commitment to and involvement in statewide and local elections in the future. It remains to be seen whether these efforts will have a substantial impact on future election outcomes.

One final observation concerning the outsider influence and competition in congressional elections is in order. In the past two election cycles, many incumbents have been rendered noticeably vulnerable, thanks to a poorly performing economy, scandal, redistricting, and a host of other forces. Yet, in each of these elections, many incumbents have been able to survive, thanks in large part to the fact that they faced weak or no opposition. Jacobson and Kernell (1983) have argued persuasively that quality challengers engage in strategic behavior, selectively choosing their time to enter a race against an incumbent when the political winds look favorable. The interesting thing to note here is that the early judgments have been largely incorrect, casting some doubt on the rationality of these early decisions. In order for the outsider force (or any other) to have a substantial impact on the Congress, it is necessary for well-qualified candidates to be willing to throw their hats in the ring early and face an incumbent. It remains to be seen whether the experience of 1990 and 1992 are reflected in a greater willingness on the part of experienced politicians to challenge incumbents for their seats.

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